

Title: Career Paths of Swedish Top-Level Women Soccer Players

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Aims: The purpose of this study is to explore highest level Swedish women soccer players' career paths. The study particularly focuses on the types of paths that are taken, players' experiences of developing these, and how structural and contextual factors such as school and selection pressures implicate career development.

Method: The following research questions guide the investigation: How do women players experience their childhood and youth soccer experiences? Do they consider a professional soccer career at this young age? How do female players experience and handle their youth years when completing secondary and high school education? And when and how do female players move to the professional level and how do they experience this development? To answer these questions, semi-structured interviews we conducted with seven Swedish highest-level professional soccer players, who at the time of the interview were professional players in a premier league in Sweden or abroad and selected for the Swedish senior national team. The theoretical framework of 'careership' was employed to understand the data.

Results and Practical Implications: In employing the theory 'careership', the results of this study show that the players enjoyed childhood soccer participation and developed meaningful horizons for soccer during this time. This horizon allowed them to see a soccer

future and strategically develop their soccer career paths. As the players were selected into higher level teams, their early horizon for soccer was confirmed with a horizon for soccer talent. This horizon coincided with entering a soccer secondary school. The combination of high-level soccer and increased educational demands, however, was experienced as problematic because it created a convoluted schedule. The players did not question this loading but felt that they were physically ill-prepared for the demands. In response, they increased their training by going to fitness gyms, and reduced their focus on education. This intensified their horizon for soccer, but also resulted in a number of injuries. Thus, despite their dual career situation, the players did not develop equally in soccer and education, but rather, prioritized soccer over education. The results suggest that the Swedish dual career concept and practice may not have the desired effect of athletes equally developing their education and sport. It is recommended that sport organizations and sport schools carefully consider the demands they place on their student athletes and the potential consequences for both their health and educational achievements, and outlook this may have.

TASS have produced this lay summary. The full article is available (permissions may apply): <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14660970.2018.1431775?af=R>